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THE RELIGION OF A LAYMAN

A STUDY OF THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

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IV. THE PRIMACY OF THE MORAL VALUES

The wise man puts first things first, and then all the other things in their proper order. He does not get the cart before the horse. He does not look for a crop of apples until he has planted his trees with their roots in the ground. He does not expect results in advance of a sufficing cause. In every case he gives his first attention to that which is primary and fundamental, knowing that this is the shortest road to that final achievement which he has in mind.

Here in the passage for our study the Master was showing his disciples how to map out their lives. The first question he raised was, Where are the real values in life? He insisted that they were within. Many of the people of his day did not think so. They maintained that the real values were in barns and in banks and in stores where we find an abundance of things.

One man of whom the Master spoke was straining every nerve and sweating at every pore in his effort to build big barns and fill them with things. When he had his barns filled with things, when he had enough laid up to last him for a hundred years, he said to himself, "Soul, take thine ease. Eat, drink and be merry." He was talking to his stomach under the impression that he was addressing his soul. The soul does not live upon things which are stored up in

barns. It lives by all the great words which proceed out of the mouth of God.

The Master told the man that he was a fool, inasmuch as a man's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he has. And then he said to his disciples, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth where moth and rust corrupt and where thieves break through and steal. Lay up for yourselves treasures in Heaven, for where your treasure is there will your heart be."

Treasures in Heaven! He was not thinking about the hereafter; he was not speaking about some celestial abode into which men might enter when they died. He was speaking to a group of young men; he expected them to live for a long time, and he was telling them what to do then and there. Lay up for yourselves those character values, those qualities of mind and heart, which make a man rich, gloriously and permanently rich, at any time, anywhere.

"How much is that man worth?" we often ask in blunt fashion. As a rule we are not thinking of the worth of the man—we are merely asking about the value of the things he happens to own. This can be readily ascertained from Bradstreet or from the assessor's books, or from the man's return as to his income tax. The worth of the man is another question altogether; it turns upon the

man's qualities of mind and heart, upon the amount of good he has done and the sort of character he has developed in the process. He may in addition to the things he possesses be worth a great deal or, on the other hand, he may with all his things not be worth enough to pay for the powder and shot it would take to blow him up. In every case the worth of the man is a question of personality.

"How much did he leave?" one man asked another when they were speaking of the death of a well-known citizen. "He left all he had," was the reply. If that were true, then the man's life was a tragedy. We have only a life estate in these things at best—our tenure is insecure. If a man leaves all he has, he arrives in the other world poor indeed. One thing is secure, one thing a man is never compelled nor allowed to leave behind, and that is himself. He takes his own qualities of mind and heart with him wherever he goes. That very fact becomes at once his highest reward or his sorest penalty. It is heaven or hell for him to be compelled to spend an eternity with the sort of men he has become. "Therefore," Jesus said, "lay up treasures for yourself in that realm of moral accumulation where neither moth nor rust corrupt, where neither thieves nor death can rob you."

He saw the people of his day all fussy and busy over two questions: "What shall we eat?" "Wherewithal shall we be clothed?" The Master cut short all that concern with his terse statement: "The life is more than meat; the body is more than raiment."

Put first things first! What shall I eat? It is a necessary question, but it is secondary. The first question to be

answered is, Am I worth feeding? Is it important that I should be kept alive? Does the world really need another man of my type? Can it afford to use good food to keep me going? This question must take precedence, because the quality of a life is more important than the question of securing meat to feed that life.

Wherewithal shall I be clothed? If I am going into society I must put on something. But that question also is secondary. Is it important that I should go? Will society be any wiser, any better, any happier, because I am there? The quality of the inner life is of more importance than the question of raiment. Therefore, in your whole quest of values, put first things first; seek first that which is fundamental.

And life has a way of asserting its mastery over things. It takes up material of all sorts and makes out of it what it will. Here is a cow and sheep and a flock of geese feeding together in the same pasture. They are eating the same green grass. And there before your eyes the grass is becoming hair on the back of the cow, wool on the backs of the sheep, and feathers on the backs of the geese. Life has its way. The life is more than meat; it compels the material it uses to minister to its own particular line of advance.

Jacob Riis goes down to the lower East Side of New York City, where there is dirt and vice and crime. He does not become dirty or vicious or criminal by his contact with those wretched facts. He becomes all the finer year by year as he battles with those conditions. Jane Addams goes over to Halsted Street, Chicago, where there are thieves and

thugs and harlots, and she lives there. She does not sacrifice one jot of her own honor and purity in that sorry situation. Her own womanhood shines out the more resplendent by virtue of the heroic service she is rendering. Life when it is aided and replenished from above has its way. Therefore, lay up treasure in that finer quality of life which is supreme.

The hour is coming swiftly when it will be seen that all any man is worth is to be found in the good he has done and in the character he has won. No matter what Bradstreet says! No matter though the Chamber of Commerce may adjourn on the day of his funeral, and all the flags of the city may be at half-mast! All that the man is worth is to be found in his personal qualities of mind and heart. All the rest are mere things from which he is now separated forever. "What I kept I lost," a rich man said, as he stood before the Great White Throne, "What I gave away I have now." As a matter of fact, all that a man is worth at any time is to be found in those character values which the Master said were supreme. Therefore, lay up your treasures in that bank.

In the next place, the Master asked, How are these values to be gained? By singleness of aim! No man can serve two masters without getting things mixed. He will either love the one and hate the other, or he will hold to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and Mammon. You cannot make it the supreme business of your life to get money by hook or by crook and make it the supreme business of your life at the same time to serve God. The man who deifies money until it stands before him saying, "I am the lord that

brought thee up—have no other god but me," cannot at the same time serve the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. There must be one supreme aim and purpose which brings all the minor interests of the man's life into subjection to that intent, thus giving that life unity and direction.

The light of the body is the eye; it is through this door that all our impressions of the visible world reach the inner consciousness. Therefore, if thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. You will see things as they are, in their right proportions, and in their true perspective.

It is possible to push one eye badly out of place so that you see double. The muscles which control the eyes may be disordered, so that they no longer produce a single, definite image of what you see. A man came out of his club one night where he had been dined and wine—particularly wine—and a friend was assisting him down the steps. "You will get into the first one of the two cabs which you see standing there," the friend said to him; "the second one is not there." In like manner, the moral vision may be deranged until a man's moral perceptions are no longer clear-cut. He sees double, his impression of the finer values is all blurred and confused. Let your eye be single, simple, straightforward, that your whole inner life may be full of light.

It is just as William DeWitt Hyde put it to the students at Bowdoin.

Live in the active rather than the passive voice, intent upon what you can do rather than upon what may happen to you. Live in the indicative mood, not the subjunctive, concerned with facts as they are rather than

as they might be. Live in the present tense, concentrating upon the duty at hand, without regrets for the past or worry about the future. Live in the first person, criticising yourself rather than condemning others. Live in the singular number, caring more for the approval of your own conscience than for popularity with the many. And inasmuch as we must have some verb to conjugate we cannot do better than to take the one we all used both in Latin and in English, *amo*, "I love." I live in the spirit of an intelligent good will that all the activities of my life may be brought into a unity of purpose.

The real quality of a man's life is not always indicated by his present achievements. It is not so much what you have done, it is what you want to do and mean to do that tells the story. It is not what you are at this moment, it is what you want to be and by God's grace intend to be that marks you up or down on the books the angels keep. It is the upward, outward, Godward reach of a man's aspiration and resolve that gives him character. Therefore, Jesus urged upon his followers that simplicity and definiteness of moral purpose which would bring all their actions into harmony with the will of God.

When a half-dozen carrier pigeons are suddenly released, they may fly into the air and circle about in uncertain fashion for a time. They have been under cover, they have lost their bearings. Presently the homing instinct makes it clear to one of them which way the goal lies and they are off, straight as a die, to the place where they would be. When a man is lost in the woods and does not know in what direction the stream lies, on the banks of which he has pitched his tent, the best thing he can do is to climb

the highest tree in sight. From that point of vantage he can look out and get his bearings. Then when he comes down to solid earth every step will be in the right direction, bringing him nearer to his camp. And the office of religious faith is to lift a man's soul above the immediate surroundings, which may hinder his outlook upon life and enable him to see where the true values are to be found. Then by this uplift which comes through prayer and worship he begins to put one foot before the other in his daily round with some definite moral purpose. Let your eye be single, simple, sincere, that your inner life may be full of light.

In the third place, the Master insisted that this quest should be carried on without worry. "Be not anxious," he said, "for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, or what ye shall put on!" How timely his word was—it might have been spoken yesterday. There are unfortunate people to whom the barest means of subsistence become an occasion for daily, hourly worry. Our hearts go out to them in sympathy. The Master was not thinking of them. He saw about him, as we see today, many people who are not objects of charity, but they are worried within an inch of their lives over those questions of food and raiment.

What shall we eat? How much of it? How costly shall it be? How much shall we spend on the dining-room where it is served and on the kitchen where it is prepared? How many servants shall we keep to minister to our wants? How expensive shall we make the linen, the china, the silver, and the cut glass we use in getting our food down our throats? This question of eating

and of getting the bills paid is a tremendous question for many people. Yet eating is a simple matter; John Muir would take a bag of bread, a piece of bacon, and a handful of tea and go off into the Sierra Nevada Mountains for a month, and he lived in health and strength to a ripe old age. We have made eating unnecessarily difficult with all our elaborate dishes which are a peril alike to purse and to digestion.

And that other question, What shall we put on? And what is still more vital, How will it look when we get it on? How numerous and how costly shall our garments be? What shall be the style and make of them? How much of ornament in the way of jewels, feathers, ribbons, furs, and the like shall we wrap around these bodies of ours? And what shall we put on in the way of houses, furniture, bric-à-brac, and all the other trappings of ordinary life? How costly shall the whole outer shell of life be made? We must wear something for comfort and for decency, but display has become the ruling idea rather than comfort, and the costly, irritating habit of display in the matter of dress has filled the heart of millions of people with fret and fuss in flat defiance of the Master's word and of their own better impulses.

Then to make his teaching vivid, he introduces one of those striking paradoxes which are so common in the Gospels.

Consider the ravens, they neither sow nor reap. They have neither storehouse nor barn, yet God feeds them. How much better are ye than the birds! Consider the lilies, how they grow! They toil not, neither do they spin, yet I say unto you Solomon in all his glory was never so well dressed

as one of these wild flowers. If then God so clothes the grass which today is in the field and tomorrow is cast into the oven for fuel, how much more will He clothe you! O, ye of little faith, be not anxious saying, What shall we eat or wherewithal shall we be clothed. After these things do the nations of the world seek, and your Heavenly Father knows that ye have need of all these things.

Now what shall we make of all that? Sweet and beautiful ideals they seem to many a practical, hard-headed person, but utterly futile! When I was reading that lesson once I noticed a real estate man and a grocer sitting in adjoining pews. When I came to that verse the real estate man looked over at the grocer as much as to say, "Imagine being a lily in the real estate business!" The other man nodded back as much as to say, "Or a raven in a grocery!" And so those two men threw the whole passage out into the aisle as being a piece of sentimentality uttered by an oriental dreamer, but entirely unsuited to the needs of practical men. It might have done in Palestine two thousand years ago, they intimated, but it would not work here in the United States of America today. Thus men take the letter of Scripture which killeth and miss the spirit of it which maketh alive.

The ravens do not sow nor reap. They were not made to sow and reap—they do the things they were made to do. They are true to the law of their being. They function according to their own natures. They fly to and fro, keen of eye and swift of wing, seeking their meat from God, and in the great natural order which enfolds them they are fed. They live out their ravenhood without fret or fuss.

The lilies do not toil nor spin—they were not made to toil and spin. They do the things they were made to do. They function according to their natures. They are true to the law of their being. They live out their lilyhood. They reach down and claim all that the soil has for them; they look up steadfastly to receive the sun and rain and dew, and so they are clothed with beauty.

Do that! You were not made to be ravens, neither sowing nor reaping; you were not made to be lilies, neither toiling nor spinning. Do the things you were made to do. Live out your manhood and your womanhood. Be true to the law of your being. Function according to your natures. Strive for self-realization along the line of the Divine Purpose for you. Whatsoever your hands and your minds find to do, do it well. Labor six days wisely and usefully, doing all your work—it is the command of God. Rest and aspire one day in seven. That also is the command of God. And you may rest assured that when the men and women of any community are thus bringing their lives into harmony with the will of God for them, in the great abiding order which enfolds them, they too will be fed and clothed.

Here is the principle: "Seek first the Kingdom of God" and all these things will be added. The question of food and raiment is no empty idle question, the Heavenly Father knows that we have need of all these things for comfort, for growth, for happiness. But he would have all these questions in the right order. Put first things first. Seek first the sway and rule of the Divine Spirit in all your interests and affairs. And wherever that quality of life is attained

we may be sure that in their proper order all things needed for life and growth will be added.

But here as everywhere the effort must be a social effort. No man can do it all by himself and enter into the full realization of the promise. Seek first the Kingdom of God, the sway and rule of the Divine Spirit in your own heart. Seek it at all those points where your life impinges upon the lives of your fellows. Seek it if you are an employer in your treatment of those other lives which are bound up with your own in that enterprise which enables you to eat and drink. Ask yourself point by point what the sway and rule of the Divine Spirit would mean in wages and hours, in conditions of employment, and in the distribution of values. Ask yourself, if you are an employee, what the sway and rule of the Divine Spirit would require of you in the use of time, material, and machinery, which belong to the man whose administrative and organizing ability brought into existence that business which offers you a decent chance to earn your bread. Seek the sway and rule of the Divine Spirit in the particular place you hold in the organized life of the community. In these common, everyday interests say, "Thy Kingdom come! Thy Will be done here as it is done in Heaven!" And as surely as God lives when any community of men and women are thus minded and are thus striving, all things needed for life and growth will be added.

There was a man once who was a general in the British army. His name was Charles George Gordon. He had an illustrious career in South Africa, in China, and in Egypt where he finally laid

down his life in the discharge of his duty. He was not worldly wise. He took great risks and sometimes did things which men esteemed fanatical. He was a religious mystic, and he moved about with his head among the stars even when the rest of his body was in the garb of a soldier.

When he was in command of the garrison at Gravesend below London, he became interested in the ragged little urchins of the town. He opened a night school for them. He secured the use of some vacant lots where they could play cricket and have their own football field. On Sunday he taught them to fear God and honor the Queen and love their country. He did so much for them that he won their everlasting gratitude. One morning, when the guard was changed, the soldiers noticed that some urchin had written in chalk on the outer wall of the fort these words, "God bless the Kurnel." The boy spelled it as I have indicated, but the soldiers knew what the boy meant, and God knew. He blessed the Kurnel.

After Gordon had rendered his notable service the British government sent to Khartoum and took his body and carried it back to London to bury it in St. Paul's Cathedral. When you go there to look at the inscription on his tomb, this is what you find, "A man who at all times and everywhere gave his strength to the weak, his sympathy to the suffering, his substance to the poor, and his heart to God." He deserved his epitaph. He deserved his tomb in St. Paul's. He was a man who sought first the Kingdom of God, and he was loved throughout the English-speaking world and beyond.

Here is the ground of our assurance! Seek first the Kingdom of God—it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom. He finds his supreme joy in establishing the sway and rule of his spirit in your own inner life and in the relationships you sustain to those about you. He finds his supreme joy in aiding you in the realization of your highest, dearest hopes. This guarantees success. When any man is faced wrong, he has the whole moral order and the will of his Maker against him. When he is faced right, he has the wind and the tide with him. He has the moral order and the power of God steadily backing him up in his supreme endeavor. Put first things first. Make the moral values supreme in your rating. Seek first the Kingdom, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the mastery of all those forces and materials needed for your permanent good.

We have fallen upon times when the realities of war have made the laymen of the world impatient touching all the frills of religion. They do not care a straw whether a man says tweedle-dee or tweedle-dum when he points out the intricacies of his theological belief. They do not care whether a great deal of water was used or only a little when the man was baptized. They remember that it was John the Baptist himself who said, "I indeed baptize you with water"—it was all he could do—"One cometh after me mightier than I whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose; He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit." And when a man has been baptized with the spirit of justice and mercy, with the spirit of upright living and of unselfish service, water baptism is of slight importance

And if he has not been thus baptized with the Divine Spirit, no amount of water will save him.

The laymen of our day care very little for those petty, sectarian squabbles which have held Christian people apart. They are saying as was said of old, "One

is our Master, even Christ, and all we are brethren." And in that high mood of fraternal feeling they stand ready to take hold together to build that kingdom of righteousness and peace and joy in which all good men whatever their church affiliation alike believe.